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From: "Helen Dragas"
Sender: "Helen Dragas"
Subject: RE: tough headline

HORS
TEXT

Date: Mon, 12 Dec 2011 18:55:29 -0400

To: "Simon, John \jds2ts\" <jds2ts@eservices.virginia.edu>

Cc: "Kington, Mark" <Mark.Kington@x10capital.com>, "Teresa A. Sullivan" <President.Sullivan@virginia.edu>

John,

Thank you for the informative response - I now understand the framework and the core purpose of the course. And I appreciate that the course subject can be defended -- but the title of the course and the headline of the article probably aren't helping us justify funding requests from parents, taxpayers and legislators.

Opinions will, of course, vary on curricular content and direction, but there must be *some* internal arbiter of what is appropriate. I don't purport to know what that is, but it is clear to me that others do (at least purport to know), and that those people can influence our future. We should be mindful of that, in my opinion.

Helen

From: Simon, John (jds2ts) [mailto:jds2ts@eservices.virginia.edu]

Sent: Sunday, December 11, 2011 6:37 PM

To: Helen Dragas

Cc: Kington, Mark; Sullivan, Teresa (tas6n)

Subject: RE: tough headline

Hi Helen

I apologize that it has taken me a couple days to respond to your email, but I wanted to dive into the details before responding.

The course in question was offered by Christa Romanosky, a Poet and graduate student at UVa, and was listed as ENWR 1510, "GaGa for Gaga: Sex, Gender, and Identity". In this class, students analyzed how the musician pushes social boundaries with her work.

ENWR is a writing course. A summary of the general description of ENWR1510 follows:

ENWR 1510: the academic argument course for students scoring 490-710 on the writing portion of the SAT. ENWR 1510 often entails peer-editing, staged assignments, and group projects.

This particular ENWR 1510 class enrolled 19 students. ENWR 1510 is a required class (the 1st year writing requirement), and in any given year we may over 100 sections of this class. They are taught by Graduate Teaching Assistants. For this introductory course to argumentative essay writing, Romanosky chose the Lady Gaga theme to establish an engaging framework for critical analysis.

While not a conventional choice for a topic, the various offerings try to present a wide range of themes. One of the reasons for a range of topics is to engage students in writing about topics that interest them. I suspect this particular topic was also chosen because Lady GaGa performed in JPJ in September 2010. I provide below the general information related to themed ENWR courses, to give you a sense of how the overall design of the series of courses are framed. I think we would all agree that learning to write well, frame and present and defend an argument, and expand their writing to engage complex issues are skills that will serve our students well.

A Note on Themed ENWR Courses:

Because we write more convincingly when we are familiar with our subject, 1500-level courses in academic writing at UVa are usually based on seminar-style topics. In these courses, students typically begin by asking questions about a shared set of readings.

These initial questions develop into paper topics as we work to find answers to our classmates' questions. In turn, the provisional answers in first papers typically prompt classmates to offer alternative explanations or else enable the group to ask more sophisticated questions. In seminar-style sections, later papers build on conversations begun in earlier papers, research, and ongoing class discussions. As the semester unfolds, students may pursue research interests related to the class core.

Although these sections are topical, the focus is still firmly on academic writing and problem solving. The course themes simply provide students with shared sets of questions, readings, and knowledge to address in their papers.

I also looked into themes from this year's course offerings and include

US in Iraq and Afghanistan

Global Medicine

Ancient Greece

Environmental Stability

Social Class in America

Technology and Democracy

Playing with Genes

New Media and the Middle East

Race in American Film

But there are also themes that are less conventional, but it is felt strongly, and I agree, that such a range of topics is best for engaging the students in advancing their writing and critical thinking skills. A full listing can be found at the bottom of the page given by the following link.

<http://rabi.phys.virginia.edu/mySIS/CS2/page.php?Semester=1118&Type=Group&Group=English>

I hope this information is helpful to you.

John

From: Helen Dragas [mailto:HDragas@dragas.com]

Sent: Friday, December 09, 2011 4:12 PM

To: Sullivan, Teresa (tas6n); Simon, John (jds2ts)

Cc: Kington, Mark

Subject: tough headline

<http://blog.heritage.org/2011/12/09/the-lady-gaga-fication-of-higher-ed/>

